

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2351

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CLEARED BY SENATOR BIDEN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OREP (BIDEN, JOSEPH)
SUBJECT: CODEL BIDEN: CALL ON CZECHOSLOVAK FEDERAL ASSEMBLY AUG 17

1. SENATOR BIDEN, ACCOMPANIED BY JOHN RITCH OF SUBCOMMITTEE
ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, AS WELL AS CHARGE AND EMBOFF, MET FOR
THREE HOURS WITH FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
JAN MARKO, HOUSE OF PEOPLE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
LASTOVICKA, AND AIDES AUGUST 17 FOR A MARKEDLY FRANK, BUT
FRIENDLY EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. THIS MESSAGE REPORTS HIGHLIGHTS
OF THE DISCUSSION.

2. MARKO OPENED THE MEETING WITH A CORDIAL WELCOME TO THE SENATOR,
SPOKE AT LENGTH OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM,
THEN EXPOUNDED CZECHOSLOVAK POSITION ON CLAIMS/GOLD, NOTING THE
"PARADOX" OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S SETTling CLAIMS WITH FORMER ENEMY STATE
S,
WHILE BEING UNABLE TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH U.S. DESPITE WARTIME
ALLIANCE WITH USG. HE EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT
CARTER'S EMPHASIS ON BUILDING NEW US ARMAMENTS AFTER CAMPAIGNING
TO CUT U.S. DEFENSE BUDGET, ESPECIALLY CRITICIZED NEUTRON BOMB AND,
WITH REFERENCE TO HELSINKI FINAL ACT, STRESSED CZECHOSLOVAK
REJECTION OF INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. MARKO EMPHASIZED
GOC DISLIKE FOR THE FACT THAT "CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS THE FIRST COUNTRY
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TO BE CRITICIZED" BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IN ITS HUMAN
RIGHTS CAMPAIGN (I.E. BY THE DEPARTMENT'S PRESS STATEMENT OF
JANUARY 26).

3. IN RESPONSE, SENATOR BIDEN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR RECEPTION
ACCORDED HIM AND MOVED SWIFTLY TO PUT MARKO ON THE DEFENSIVE
BY SAYING HIS AMERICAN CONSTITUENTS COULD NOT UNDERSTAND MANY THINGS

ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA -- E.G. WHY UNITED STATES SHOULD RETURN GOLD TO A GOVERNMENT THAT WAS NOT TRULY REPRESENTATIVE OF CZECHOSLOVAK PEOPLE; WHY PEOPLE IN CSSR ARE NOT ABLE TO SAY WHAT THEY THINK AND TRAVEL FREELY, AND HOW PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERFERENCE SQUARED WITH CONTINUING PRESENCE OF SOVIET TROOPS ON CZECHOSLOVAK SOIL. AS FOR U.S. ARMS PROGRAM, THE SENATOR REASONED THAT CURRENT STEPS APPEAR NECESSARY IN RESPONSE TO MASSIVE SOVIET MILITARY BUILDUP OF RECENT YEARS -- A BUILDUP WHICH CONTINUES AT PRESENT.

4. TAKEN SOMEWHAT ABACK, MARKO HANDLED, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS, ALL BUT QUESTION ABOUT SOVIET TROOPS, WHICH HE AVOIDED ENTIRELY.

5. SENATOR PRESSED MARKO FOR CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT'S VIEW OF CHARTER 77, MBFR, POSSIBILITY THAT USG MIGHT UNILATERALLY WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM WESTERN EUROPE, AND THE FUTURE OF US-CZECHOSLOVAK BILATERAL TRADE.

6. MARKO STRUGGLED TO EXPLAIN THAT CHARTER 77 INVOLVED ONLY A SMALL, ISOLATED GROUP OF INTELLECTUALS COMMANDING NO POPULAR SUPPORT. ON MBFR, HE EXPRESSED STRONG CZECHOSLOVAK SUPPORT IN ULTIMATE FORCE REDUCTIONS SAFEGUARDING THE SECURITY OF ALL PARTICIPANT STATES. HE APPEARED TO HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH THE IDEA OF UNILATERAL U.S. WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS FROM EUROPE. AT FIRST, HE SAID CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAD "NO DESIRE TO SEE THE UNITED STATES

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WEAKENED"; EVENTUALLY, HOWEVER, HE CONCLUDED THAT U.S. WITHDRAWAL-- EVEN UNILATERALLY--WOULD BE "A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT." AS FOR BILATERAL TRADE, MARKO THOUGHT CZECHOSLOVAKIA COULD COMPETE EFFECTIVELY IN THE U.S. MARKET, IF GOC RECEIVED MFN. HE BELIEVED CZECHS COULD SELL MANY EXPORT ITEMS TO THE U.S., JUST AS THEY PRESENTLY DO THE FRG.

7. TOWARD THE END OF DISCUSSION, SENATOR BIDEN POLITELY, BUT MINCING NO WORDS, ASKED WHETHER CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT EXPECTED ANY DEMONSTRATIONS ON AUGUST 20-21 ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET INVASION IN 1968, AND WHETHER GOC WOULD BE AFFONTED IF SENATOR VISITED GRAVE OF JAN PALACH, THE YOUNG CZECH WHO WAS VICTIM OF SELF-IMMOLATION IN PROTEST AGAINST SOVIET OCCUPATION. MARKO TOOK POSITION THAT CZECHOSLOVAK-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP HAD BEEN LONG SINCE NORMALIZED AND CLAIMED THE PUBLIC "WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND" THE LATTER REQUEST. AS FOR DEMONSTRATIONS, IF THE SENATOR KNEW THE SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA BETTER, HE WOULD REALIZE THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ANY DEMONSTRATIONS.

8. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THIS PROVOCATIVE BUT POLITE

TWO AND ONE-HALF HOUR EXCHANGE OF VIEWS, SENATOR BIDEN AGAIN
THANKED MARKO AND INVITED HIM AND HIS COLLEAGUES TO VISIT THE
UNITED STATES.
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